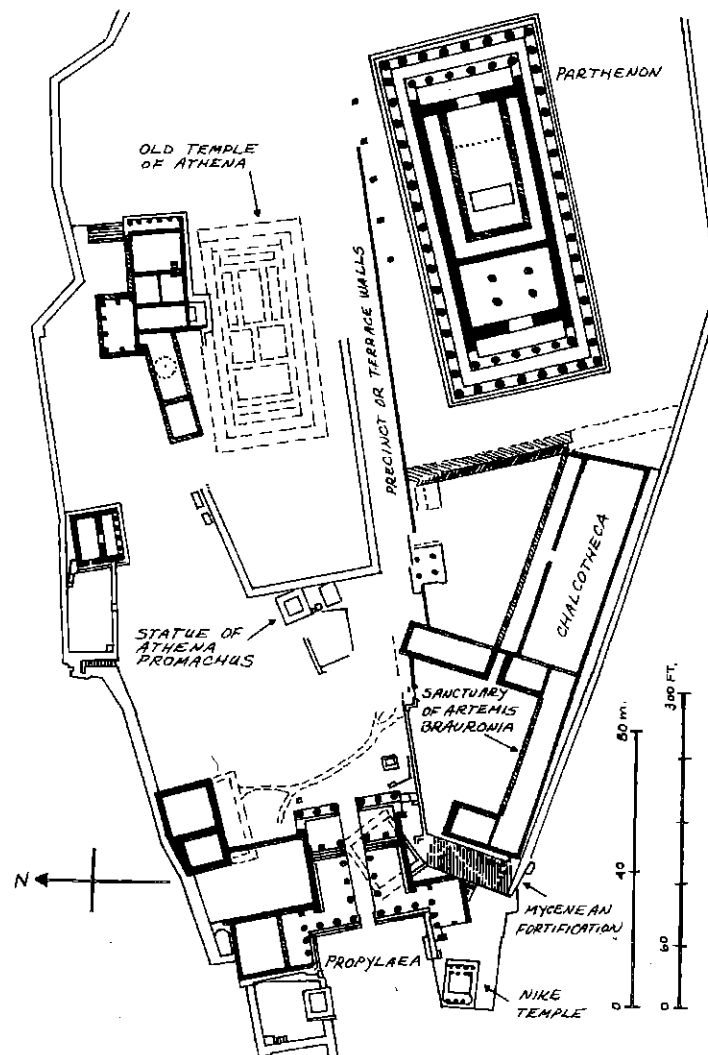


## The Rebuilding of the Acropolis Background Information

In the moment of their triumph over the Persians in 490 B.C. at Marathon, the Athenians decided to build a wonderful new temple on their **Acropolis** or hilltop citadel (*Figure One*). This temple was to honor their patron goddess **Athena** whom the Athenians believed had helped them win the battle, and it was also to be a memorial to those men who had died at Marathon.

Figure One: The Classical Acropolis



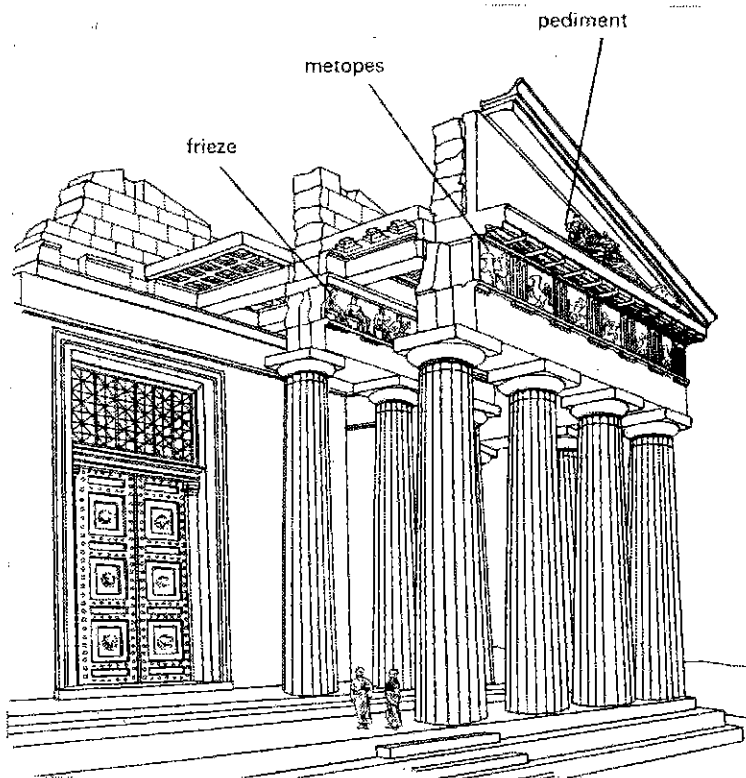
Illustrated by  
Carole Collier Frick

However, as the foundations were going up, the Persians returned to Athens in 480–79 B.C., destroying the city and burning the Acropolis. The Athenians wisely decided to evacuate their city and to battle the Persians at sea, winning the decisive victory at the Bay of Salamis. When the Athenians returned to Athens, they took the damaged ruins of the temple and set them into the walls of the Acropolis as a memorial.

Under the leadership of Athens, a league was now formed among Greek city-states to keep the Persians at bay. The meetings and treasury were held at the island of Delos, and thus they called themselves the **Delian League**. As time went on, most cities chose to give money to the league, relying on Athens to maintain a navy strong enough to fight the Persians. So, with time, Athens became the leader of an empire, rather than a member of an alliance of equal city-states.

In 454 B.C. the Athenians transferred the Delian treasury to Athens and **Pericles**, the most powerful speaker and leader of the Athenian democracy, decided to use part of the League's funds to rebuild the once-great Acropolis. The new Acropolis would glorify the power and culture of Athens and it would inspire men throughout the generations just as Pericles had predicted. It would also provide years of work for skilled craftsmen and artisans. The passage from Plutarch's *Life of Pericles* describes both motives (see **Document B**).

The first and most important building to go up was the **Parthenon**, the temple which housed the statue of Athena. This structure was overseen by Pericles' friend, the sculptor **Pheidias**. It was built to glorify both Athena and the people of Athens. An example of this

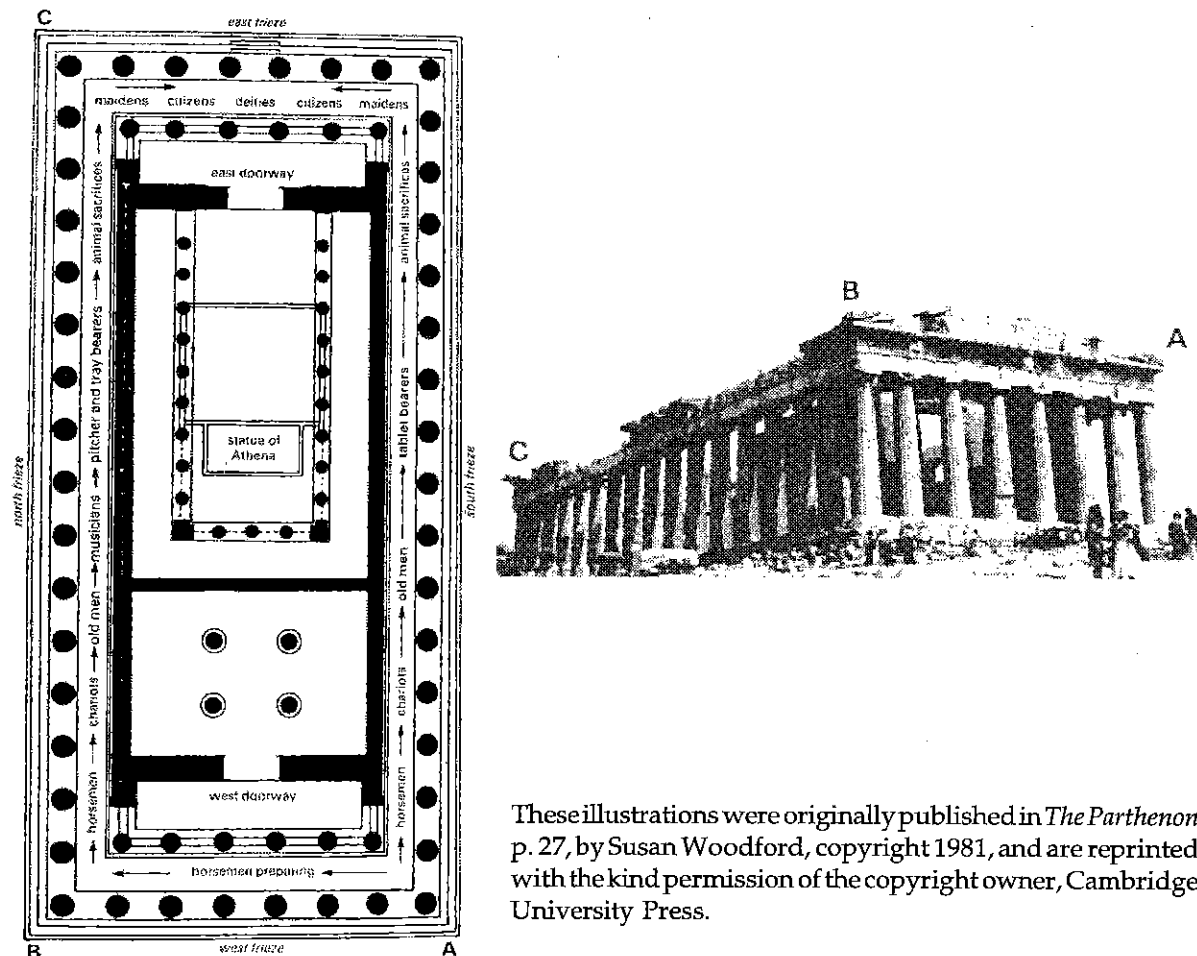


**Figure Two:**  
**The Parthenon—**  
**Location of Sculptures**

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civic pride is the Parthenon **frieze**, the **statuary** work done over the porches of the building (*Figure 3*). This series of sculptures may depict the **Panathenaic Procession** in which citizens marched up to the temple annually to honor Athena. Originally the statues would have been painted in bright colors.

**Figure Three: Plan of the Parthenon with the order of Frieze Procession**



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The Parthenon was built according to strict mathematical proportions and most of its structural elements were at a ratio of 9:4. This led to a great beauty and symmetry in its design. Yet at the same time, the columns were made to bulge in the middle and to lean slightly inward to produce a less severe appearance and to please the eye (*Figure Four*).

After the Parthenon was finished (about 437 B.C.) the hundreds of skilled and experienced sculptors and stone masons went to work on the **Propylea**, or entry gate. Unfortunately, with the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War in 432 B.C., the beautiful refinements being carved on the outside of the building were never completed. You can

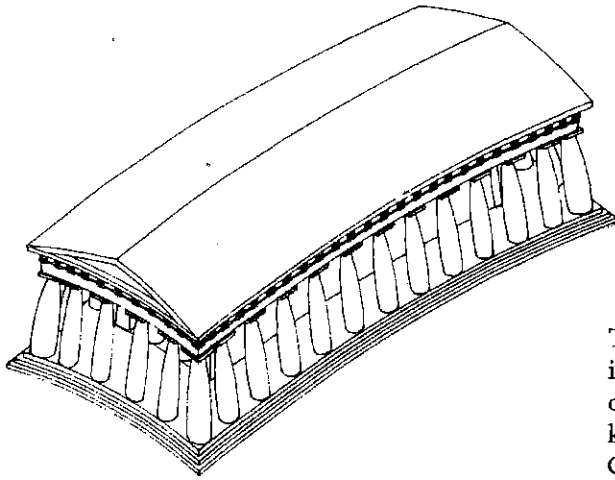
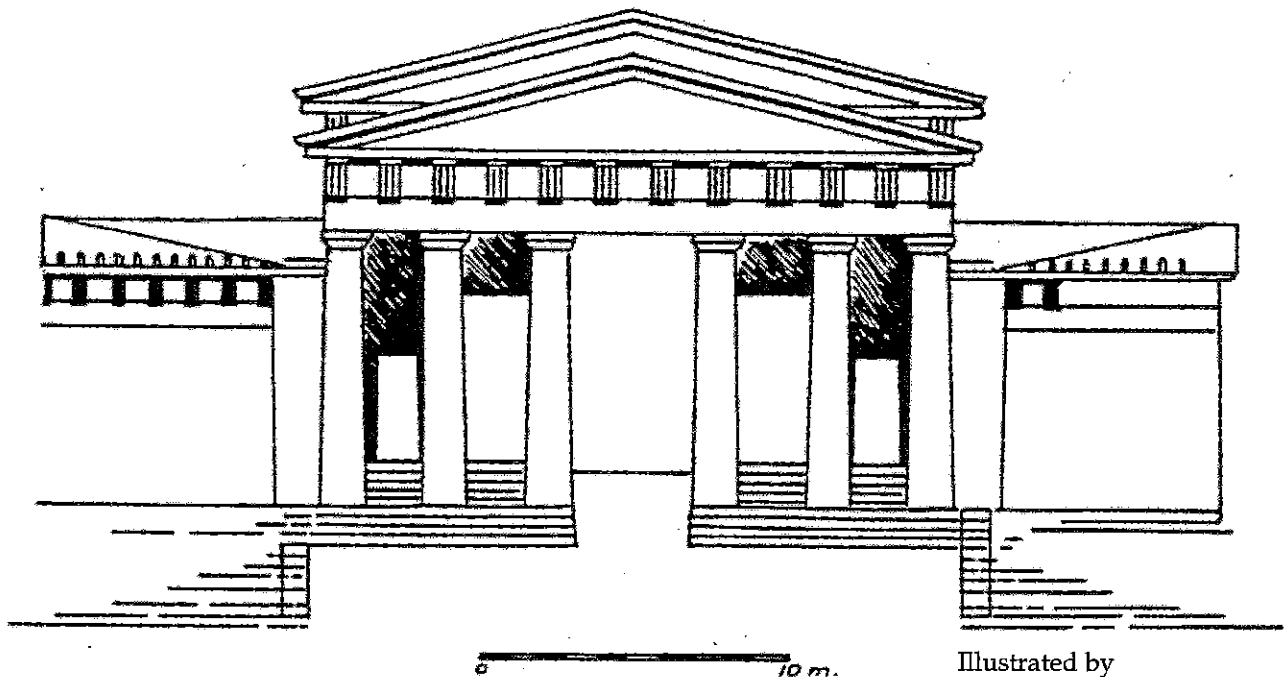


Figure Four: The Parthenon

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still see today, 2,500 years later, where the stone masons who were doing the fine detailed carvings on the columns had to put their chisels down and stop work (*Figure Five*).

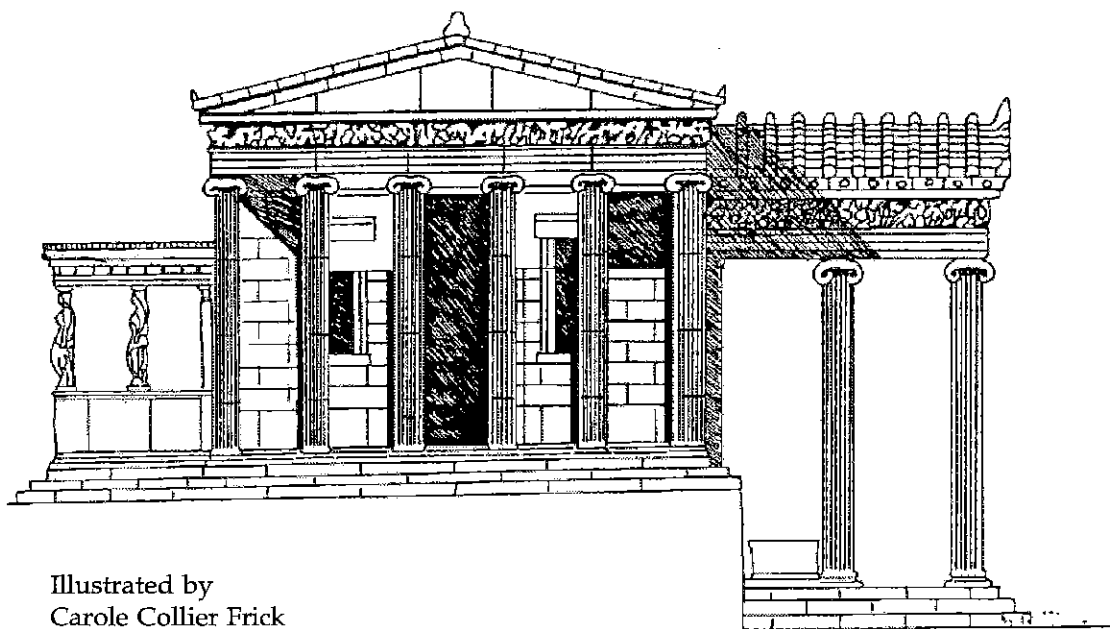
Figure Five: The Propylaea



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The **Erechtheum** was the last major temple to be built on the Acropolis (*Figure Six*). It was begun in 421 B.C. and finished in 405 B.C. It was built in honor of Erechtheus, the mythical king who had founded ancient Athens. He had judged a contest between Athena and **Poseidon** (god of the sea) to see who would be head deity of the city. Poseidon launched a thunderbolt, leaving a hole in the rock on top of the Acropolis. Athena offered the olive tree, which she made grow out of the hole. Erechtheus chose

**Figure Six: The Erechtheum**



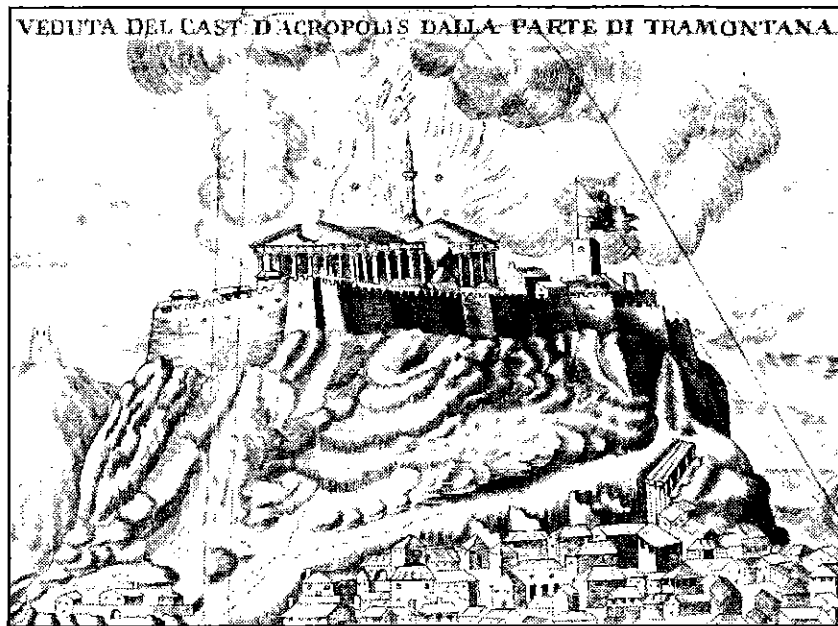
her. Her gift was truly valuable. Much of Athens' wealth came from olive cultivation and the export of oil. This building contained the gifts that Poseidon and Athena had given the city. In a courtyard of the temple was the gnarled olive tree, the first of all time. Legend says that the tree, destroyed by the Persians, sprang to life again after they left.

The Acropolis dominated Athens in every sense: it loomed high over the **Agora**, the political and commercial center of the city. Citizens went up alone or in procession to pray and offer sacrifice in the temples. The giant statue of Athena in front of the Parthenon could be seen miles out to sea. Plays were performed in the theaters just below. The assembly met on a hill (the Pnyx) a stone's throw away.

If you go to Athens today, high above the city you will still see the buildings of the Acropolis. However, these buildings which inspire us today, have suffered centuries of pillage and neglect. It is extraordinary that they still stand out in such grandeur. In the sixth century A.D. Christianity took over in Greece. The Parthenon was at that time

transformed from a temple into a church. After the conquest by the Ottoman Turks ca. 1460 A.D., it became a mosque. Minarets were added at this time. Later it was used as a storage place for gun powder by the Turks. During the siege of the Turkish garrison by the Venetians in 1687 a shell blew the entire structure up (*Figure Seven*). Ruins that we see today are largely due to that as well as earthquakes. Other buildings were allowed to fall into ruin and some were used as stone quarries. (Lord Elgin in 1801 saved

**Figure Seven: Gun Powder Explosion in the Parthenon**



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the Parthenon sculptures from being broken up and used for building materials). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries archaeologists had to reconstruct these buildings like a jigsaw puzzle. And even here, they used iron clamps and braces which are rusting and swelling and today causing further damage.

What two millennia of earthquakes, war, abuse and plunder have not accomplished may yet be achieved by Athenian smog. The marble of the Acropolis's buildings today is rapidly crumbling under the assault of atmospheric pollution and the Greek government is working on ways to preserve the Acropolis, a site which to this day inspires awe at the splendor of Periclean Athens.